

Executive Summary

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® (ABDSP) is a vast state park stretching from the mountains in eastern San Diego and Riverside counties across the desert and into Imperial County. Containing over 600,000 acres, it is among the largest state parks in the United States. The ABDSP also holds the distinction of containing the largest area of State Wilderness in California, with over 400,000 acres of ABDSP falling under this designation.

Two major east–west highway routes (County Route S22 and State Route 78) and one north–south route (County Route S2) cross the Park. The Park surrounds the unincorporated communities of Borrego Springs, and Shelter Valley, and borders residential areas in Ocotillo Wells, Ranchita, Anza, and Canebrake. It shares common boundaries with Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area on the east, and a number of adjacent public and private lands.

In accordance with the requirements set forth in § 5002.2 of the Public Resources Code and § 4332 Title 14 of the California Administration Code, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CSP) is required to prepare a General Plan for the park. The General Plan does not provide detailed management recommendations, but rather provides conceptual parameters for future management actions. General planning provides an opportunity to assess a park’s resource stewardship and interpretation, regional significance, facilities development, and recreational opportunities (discussed in the Existing Conditions Section as well as back up materials and the Appendices).

The General Plan provides guidelines for future land use management within a park in the Plan Section, including land acquisitions and the facilities required to accommodate an expected visitation increase. A first-tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as defined in §15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines is also incorporated into this General Plan. The California Department of Parks and Recreation is the lead agency for this EIR. Please refer to the Preface for a description of how the General Plan functions as a joint General Plan/EIR. The EIR addresses the broader impacts of plan implementation in the Environmental Analysis Section, and does not address specific projects, which may be proposed in the future.

General Plans are broad policy documents intended to guide park development and management for many decades. For a unit of the State Park system, law requires completion of a general plan prior to permanent, park development. Although in existence since 1933, ABDSP has never had a general plan. Numerous circumstances have combined to spur preparation of this General Plan. These include increasing pressures on the Park’s sensitive plant and animal species, the need to identify and properly protect cultural resources, and the realization that growing human impacts will continue to play a role in the future of the Park. In addition, increasing recreational demands dictate that the Park be evaluated for increasing recreational opportunities.

The Park's Declaration of Purpose has been updated to reflect modern park issues, public uses and perceptions, and a stronger philosophy of park stewardship while describing the Park's unique qualities and character. The updated Declaration of Purpose shall be as follows:

"The purpose of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® is to preserve the unique and diverse natural, cultural, and scenic resources of this Western Colorado Desert Region and to provide opportunities for high quality recreation that supports a healthy natural environment.

This desert park environment nurtures peaceful solitude, astronomical clarity, amazing forms of life, glimpses of the past, and a tremendous scope for the imagination. Therefore, management of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park® will be based upon the goal of preserving, instilling an appreciation for, and making available these treasured qualities and experiences for present and future generations."

The Plan Section of the GP/EIR delineates six management zones and a set of goals and guidelines that will guide park management, as well as specific project management and implementation. These goals and guidelines address recreational, operational, interpretive, and resource management opportunities and constraints consistent with the classifications of State Park and State Wilderness, as set forth in § 5019.53 and §5019.68 of the Public Resources Code and with Department Resource Management Directives. The General Plan does not locate or design facilities, but instead provides goals and guidelines for the appropriate types, locations, and designs of those that may be proposed in the future. The General Plan also establishes the primary interpretive themes for interpretive programs and activities.

THE GENERAL PLAN (PREFERRED PLAN) PROPOSES TO:

- Extend the existing State Wilderness by approximately 9%. The General Plan proposes to add approximately 19,122 acres to four existing wilderness areas in the park. These areas will be included in the existing Santa Rosa Mountains State Wilderness, the Grapevine Mountain Wilderness, Sheep Canyon Wilderness," and Vallecito Mountain Wilderness. In addition, two new wilderness areas are proposed that would equal about 36,675 acres. These new wilderness areas are titled *Wil-yee Wilderness* and *Sin Nombre Wilderness*. The total proposed acreage for additional and new wilderness equals approximately 55,797. See Figure 6.6 "Management Zones Preferred Alternative" Map for the location of these proposed additional and new wilderness areas.
- Classify approximately 443 acres as the *We-nelsch Cultural Preserve* sub-unit in the San Felipe Valley area, in which development and uses are restricted to protect the integrity of significant sensitive resources.
- Establish management goals and guidelines and management zones for resource management, facility operations, and accessible interpretive and recreational programs for the public within ABDSP.

Management zones in this General Plan describe the overall management purpose and intent of specific regions within the Park as well as depict their intended uses. Each zone provides direction for the general level and type of development and use within the Park.

The management zones are ordered, in general, from the highest intensity of visitor use to the lowest. Areas within each zone may also have varying degrees of use intensity. The six management zones are as follows: Information/Entrance Zone, Focused-Use Zone I (FUZ I), Focused-Use Zone II (FUZ II), Backcountry Zone (BZ), Wilderness Zone (WZ), and the Cultural Preserve Zone.

The General Plan also defines management goals and guidelines that are more specific to individual areas in ABDSP and clarifies the application of broader park-wide goals and guidelines. The following seven specific areas have multiple, co-dependent issues that require comprehensive management action: Blair Valley and Little Blair Valley, Carrizo Impact Area, Coyote Canyon, Lucky 5 Ranch Area, Sentenac Canyon, Indian Canyon, Vallecito Ranch, and Grapevine Canyon. Many goals and guidelines within the Plan Section provide direction for management plans (MP) and/or studies. The following list identifies these future planning efforts: Public Use Interface Element for Specific Geographic Areas, Cultural Resources MP, Camping MP, Roads MP, Trails MP, Natural Resources MP, Interpretive MP, and Facilities MP.

California State Parks is the lead agency responsible for preparation of the proposed ABDSP General Plan in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as required by the Public Resources Code § 5002.2 and §21000 et. seq. The Environmental Analysis Section and other sections of the General Plan document constitute the first tier Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as defined in § 15166 of the CEQA Guidelines. It should be recognized that the level of detail addressed by this EIR is comparable to the level of detail provided in the land-use proposals of the General Plan. As subsequent management plans and site-specific projects are proposed, they will be subject to further environmental review.

Although the goals and guidelines proposed in the General Plan will be largely self-mitigating, new development, maintenance, facility use, and recreational activities allowed by the General Plan have the potential to cause impacts to the environment. These impacts could include soil disturbance, erosion, lowered water quality and quantity, degradation of cultural resources, degradation of aesthetic resources, and degradation of sensitive plant and animal populations or their habitats. As a program level (first-tier) EIR (see CEQA Guidelines § 15166, § 15168), the General Plan identifies broad, park-wide environmental impacts and mitigation measures that address such impacts. Future management plans, activities, and projects will be subject to additional environmental review in order to identify specific impacts and appropriate mitigation and monitoring plans.

ALTERNATIVES

During the General Plan process, four Plan Alternatives were considered including Alternative 3, the Environmentally Superior Alternative, and the No Project Alternative. These alternatives are discussed in Section 4.4 and Table 5.7, the Alternatives Matrix. The primary distinctions between the alternatives reflect State Park, Wilderness, and Natural/Cultural Preserve designations and the allowable activities and facilities in each of these land use areas. The Preferred Plan was developed as a combination of

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 after a series of public meetings and additional visitor and resource studies brought forward new information.

Alternative 1 provided the largest amount of Focused Use I and II acreage for public facilities but was deemed inconsistent with the purpose of the park with limited protection for the park's varied resources. Alternative 2 proposed different amounts land in management zones, primarily in the Wilderness and Backcountry zones. About 1,300 acres of new State Wilderness was proposed. Alternative 2 is inconsistent with the park purpose because it does not provide adequate protection to natural and cultural resources. Alternative 3 would have afforded greater resource protection through the creation of 47,650 acres of Natural and Cultural Reserves but would have had an adverse recreational effect on many popular activities in the park that would be excluded from the Reserves.

Each of these Alternatives contained a Wetland-Riparian Zone that was not adopted in the Preferred Alternative. Instead, natural resource protection that would have been available in the Wetland-Riparian Zone, was incorporated separately under each of the remaining management zones and in the Goals and Guidelines of the Preferred Plan. By addressing wetland protection through the Goals and Guidelines within each management zone, more area is protected than would have been protected under the designated Wetland Riparian Zone.

The No Project Alternative is not feasible because the park facilities must be improved to meet recreational needs and protective measures for the park's resources need to be incorporated into the park operations. Public Resources Code § 5003 requires completion of a General Plan prior to implementation of new facility construction.

